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ABSTRACT

A study compared the number of word definitions retained by students who looked up words and wrote down definitions to the number of words retained by students who had the stories and definitions read aloud to them. Subjects, 20 boys and 20 girls in a Florida school, reading on the fifth grade level, were randomly divided into control and experimental groups. The control group looked at vocabulary words from a basal reading selection in the dictionary and wrote out the definitions on paper. The experimental group had the selection read to them by the teacher who then asked for a definition of the same words as they were encountered in the selection. A correct definition was either solicited from the students or provided by the teacher. At the conclusion of an 8-week treatment period, scores from weekly vocabulary tests for each student in the two groups were compared. Results indicated that members of the control group retained less than half of the vocabulary words while the members of the experimental group retained more than 90% of the words. Findings suggest that school systems should foster reading programs that incorporate time for reading aloud to students. (A figure presenting the experimental design and a table of data are included; 14 references, an appendix of data, and a proposal for a magazine article based on the study are attached.) (RS)

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The Effect of Reading Aloud To Fifth-Grade Students On the Acquisition Of Vocabulary

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Remember (it may not be so long ago) when you were a teenager reading one of your first novels. Perhaps it was a "Hardy Boys" or "Nancy Drew" that taught words so well by context, but every now and then, there was a word you didn't know, hadn't heard of, and surely were not going to stop reading to look up its definition.

Then think back even further, to a time when someone told you stories, someone read to you from a book with colorful, memorable pictures. Someone who, while reading to you, explained the parts you didn't understand. You were learning painlessly, enjoyably—which is how learning should feel.

Any family that has invested time in reading aloud to a child has noticed gains in vocabulary. Even if the child is merely holding the book, and modeling the reader, the child's vocabulary is increasing. In fact, most children around the age of 2-1/2 years or older will reproduce words spoken to them. Some children three years old can remember the sequence and story line of a tale which has been read and re-read to them and will correct any deviations from the plot.

From an educator's standpoint, the acquisition of language is of the utmost importance: an increasing lexicon for the student to make communication, understanding, and life easier. So any method that saves time and instructs well is viable in its efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of designating part of the students' reading time for transcribing definitions from a dictionary has been adopted by some commercial reading programs and put to use by school systems for students in grades 4-6.

Reading aloud to children, a practice used more widely in grades 1-3, has inherent personal interaction, allows instant feedback for the teachers, and fosters word meanings in a child's own language. When a child can link words to his existing bank of knowledge, learning takes place.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Valuable learning time is spent having children looking up meanings of words and writing out their definition in preparation for reading and understanding a story.

This study will compare the number of word definitions retained from the written method with the number of word definitions retained by having the definitions and stories read aloud.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Reading aloud to children from storybooks for enjoyment has great competition today. When parents come home tired from work, they consider "dealing" with the children a chore, rather than an activity to be relished. It is easier to sit the child in front of the television with its colorful grahics, which seem to do a better and more interesting job of teaching and entertaining than the parent can. The fact of the matter is, when a child enters the "Why and how come?" stage, the television doesn't provide for the one-to-one optimum learning moment.

In contrast, when a parent or teacher familiar with his/her audience can pick a book

that will have high appeal for the reading group, the reader fosters an enjoyment for books and reading. Jennings (1990), based on research, states that children love humor, they enjoy animal stories, they respond to stories that are modern and deal with characters close to their own age, and they like mystery and suspense.

According to Elly (1985), results showed that oral story-reading, at home or in school, is a significant source of vocabulary acquisition, whether or not the reading is accompanied by teacher explanation of word meanings. In this study, seven classes of seven-year-olds showed vocabulary gains of 15% from one story, without any teacher explanation; three classes that did receive explanation showed gains of 40%. Followup tests showed that this incidental vocabulary learning was relatively permanent and that low-scoring children gained as much as high-scoring children. In addition, the fetures that best predicted whether a particular word would be learned were frequency of word in the text, depiction of the words in illustrations, and the amount of redundancy in the surrounding context.

Jim Trelease mentions that reading aloud exposes the listener to other benefits in addition to language acquisition: a positive reading role model, new information, the pleasure of reading, rich vocabulary, good sentence and story grammar, a book he/she might not otherwise be exposed to, fully textured lives outside the student's own experience, and English language spoken in a manner distinctly different from that in a television show.

However, in today's society, the time available for parents to interact with their children has been shortened. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1983), in 1950 only 12% of women with children under six were in the workforce; the 1980 Census figures revealed that 45% of young women were employed, as were 62% of mothers with school-age children.

These numbers point to a situation that has changed drastically since the 1950s, along with the decline of the extended family. Today, a babysitter or daycare center has

replaced the mother or grandparent at home who spent time talking and interacting with the child on a one-to-one basis during a crucial time of development.

Although all families do not read or interact with standard English, studies of early readers (Chomsky, 1979; Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966; Teale, 1978; Wells, 1986) have consistently shown that children who have been read to regularly in their preschool years make rapid strides in their reading and language development at school.

A recent television newscast (CBS, 1991) highlighted further evidence of language acquisition resulting from reading aloud to children. It stated that, in January 1991, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* released the results of a study that showed that three-year-olds who were read to had IQ scores averaging 13 points higher than those children not read to.

Relating also to the problem statement, Cermak and Craik (1979) stated that children 7-12 years old will process language at deeper levels if they focus on meaning rather than form. Basically, words learned in context develop more of a conceptual meaning than words learned by merely looking up definitions. Cermak and Craik (1979) go on to say that children will learn and retain more from an activity such as hearing entertaining stories read aloud than from working at a contrived exercise. Indeed, as Anderson et al (1985) note, reading aloud has been shown to be the "single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading."

STATEMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS

Fifth-grade students being read aloud to will acquire more vocabulary than those students reading independently.

METHOD

SUBJECTS

Subjects will be selected from fifth-grade students of a public school system in Florida. Those fifth-grade students who have demonstrated mastery of beginning fifth-grade-level reading objectives (RSVP, level 5-1) will comprise the population. Forty subjects will be randomly selected and assigned to one of two groups.

The sample will be drawn from only one school, with students representing 41 countries. The population is laregely (75%-85%) Hispanic. The surrounding neighborhood is urban, with a transient, cosmopolitan population.

INSTRUMENTS

Subjects will be pretested and posttested on the vocabulary in the story by teacher-made tests before and after the reading lesson. The vocabulary words and stories are to be taken directly from the HBJ (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) Visions Reading Series (1989), published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Orlando, Florida.

DESIGN

There will be two randomly formed groups. The experimental group will be read aloud to and receive oral vocabulary instruction. The control group will read independently and transcribe word meanings from a dictionary. Each group will be pretested and posttested.

FIGURE 1

Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design

R 0 X_1 0
R 0 X_2 0

(Gay, 1987)

METHOD

PROCEDURE

In the fall, when fifth-grade reading groups are determined by level, 20 boys and 20 girls, ages 10 and 11, reading on level 5-1, will be randomly selected and divided into two groups of 20.

The students will comprise two separate reading classes, with two separate teachers. The teachers will use the same reading books, rated on a fifth-grade level, with selected lists of vocabulary words which are used in the stories. Children will be pretested on a story's vocabulary list. A child demonstrates mastery of a word by supplying its meaning.

Both teachers will list the vocabulary words from the selection on the blackboard.

The control group will be asked to look up the vocabulary words in a dictionary and write out their definitions on notepaper. The students in the control group will then read the selection independently. At the end of the reading, students will be posttested on the definitions of the vocabulary words.

The experimental group will have the selection read to them by the teacher. When the teacher finishes a sentence containing a vocabulary word listed on the board, he will ask the students if they can supply the meaning. The teacher will ask, "Can anyone tell me the meaning?" If the correct definition is not given, the teacher supplies the meaning, rereads the sentence, and continues reading until the next vocabulary word is encountered. If the correct response is given, a word of positive reinforcement is supplied. The teacher then repeats the definition, rereads the sentence, and goes on until the next vocabulary word is reached. The process is repeated until the conclusion of the story selection is reached.

The Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Visions Series offers four vocabulary words per selection. A total of eight selections will be used. Students from both groups will be pretested and posttested on the definitions of the selected vocabulary words.

DATA ANALYSIS

The vocabulary test scores of the two groups will be compared using a *t* Test. Two *t* Tests will be performed, one to compare pretest scores and one to compare posttest scores.

TIME SCHEDULE

Activity	Date
Selection of subjects	September 17
Pretesting	October 1-December 11
Posttesting	October 2-December 14
Data analysis	January 7-January 11
Report preparation	January 11-March 26

RESULTS

An examination of the pretest means indicates that both groups were essentially the same at the beginning of the study (see Table 1). The *t* Test for pretest showed a null hypothesis: no relationship or difference between the groups throughout the study, on all pretests.

At the conclusion of an eight-week treatment period, scores from weekly posttests for each student of the experimental group and control group were compared. A *t* Test for independent samples was used to compare the two randomly formed groups on the results of the posttest. The groups differed significantly at .05 level.

The results of this study support the research hypothesis: Fifth-grade students being read aloud to will acquire more vocabulary than those students reading independently.

The results showed that the group that was read to had mean posttest scores 50 points above the group not read to. The group not read to retained less than half of the vocabulary words, and the group that was read to retained more than 90% of the vocabulary words.

Based on the results, it was concluded that teacher-directed oral vocabulary instruction (the students being read aloud to) was more effective for increasing vocabulary than allowing students to absorb material through a self-directed reading-and-writing vocabulary lesson.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether reading aloud to students can be an effective means of vocabulary instruction. By using a pretest/posttest control group design, and a *t* test for independent samples, it was found that students acquired twice as much vocabulary being read aloud to than the group assigned to look up definitions and read the same selections independently.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Instead of using up time while children look up vocabulary words, school systems should be saving time by teaching a definition at the "teachable moment." When a child encounters a word in context and is allowed the freedom to ask the reader its meaning, the acquisition of vocabulary is more complete and insightful, and the new words are more likely to be used again as part of the child's speaking and reading vocabulary.

School systems should evaluate their reading systems to see that valuable classroom time is not being wasted. Reading systems utilizing a group rotation plan with large chunks of time set aside for transcribing words from a dictionary should be avoided. According to the results of this study, that procedure does not achieve optimal learning effects.

School systems should foster reading programs that incorporate time for reading aloud to students due to its overall effectiveness.

SUMMARY

In addition to being a very time-efficient way of teaching vocabulary, reading to students is a natural, relaxed, bonding experience. It allows for an exchange of ideas.

Reading aloud to children teaches vocabulary in a natural way, using natural behaviors—similar to that of a parent and child, the usual setting of learning a first language. There is easy, natural feedback, which is the quickest, most efficient means of evaluation.

The natural inclination to imitate gives the listening group of children a model of correctly spoken words and phrases to emulate. Not only do the children escape the speech of the streets, but they also experience how easy and enjoyable reading can be, and hopefully will pass this down to their own children

TABLE 1:

Means, Standard Deviation, and *t* Test for
Experimental and Control Groups on the Pretest and Posttest.

TEST	GROUP		*t*
PRETEST	EXPERIMENTAL	CONTROL	
Mean	9.65	8.85	.437
SD	6.73	4.68	
POSTTEST	EXPERIMENTAL	CONTROL	
Mean	93.4	42.7	24.97 *
SD	5.96	6.86	

* df = 38, p = .05

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APPENDIX

MEANS

	PRETEST SCORES				POSTTEST SCORES			
	Experimental		Control		Experimental		Control	
	X_1	X_1^2	X_2	X_2^2	X_1	X_1^2	X_2	X_2^2
1	19	361	13	169	97	9409	47	2209
2	3	9	9	81	94	8836	44	1936
3	19	361	6	36	100	10000	41	1681
4	19	361	9	81	100	10000	38	1444
5	9	81	6	36	81	6561	47	2209
6	13	169	6	36	88	7744	44	1936
7	3	9	3	9	97	9409	47	2209
8	6	36	9	81	88	7744	47	2209
9	6	36	13	169	97	9409	56	3136
10	22	484	16	256	100	10000	53	2809
11	6	36	6	36	94	8836	38	1444
12	3	9	16	256	97	9409	38	1444
13	6	36	3	9	94	8836	47	2209
14	3	9	19	361	91	8281	47	2209
15	9	81	6	36	97	9409	34	1156
16	9	81	3	9	97	9409	34	1156
17	6	36	9	81	84	7056	34	1156
18	13	169	6	36	84	7056	50	2500
19	0	0	13	169	88	7744	34	1156
20	19	361	6	36	100	10000	34	1156
	193	2725	177	1983	1868	175148	854	37364
	$\overline{X}_1 = 9.65$		$\overline{X}_2 = 8.85$		$\overline{X}_1 = 93.4$		$\overline{X}_2 = 42.7$	

STANDARD DEVIATION FORMULA

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{EX^2 - \frac{(EX)^2}{N}}{N - 1}}$$

STANDARD DEVIATIONS

PRETEST
EXPERIMENTAL

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{2725 - \frac{(193)^2}{20}}{20 - 1}} = 6.73$$

PRETEST
CONTROL

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{1983 - \frac{(177)^2}{20}}{20 - 1}} = 4.68$$

POSTTEST
EXPERIMENTAL

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{175.148 - \frac{(1868)^2}{20}}{20 - 1}} = 5.96$$

POSTTEST
CONTROL

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{37.364 - \frac{(854)^2}{20}}{20 - 1}} = 6.87$$

t Test for Pretest

	Experimental $\bar{X}_1 = 9.65$			Control $\bar{X}_2 = 8.85$		
	X_1	X_1	X_1^2	X_2	X_2	X_2^2
1	19	935	87.4	13	4.15	17.2
2	3	-6.65	44.2	9	.15	.0225
3	19	9.35	87.4	6	-2.85	8.12
4	19	9.35	87.4	9	.15	.0225
5	9	- .65	.422	6	-2.85	8.12
6	13	3.35	11.22	6	-2.85	8.12
7	3	-6.65	44.25	3	-5.85	34.2
8	6	-3.65	13.3	9	.15	.0225
9	6	-3.65	13.3	13	4.15	17.2
10	22	12.35	152.52	16	7.15	51.12
11	6	-3.65	13.3	6	-2.85	8.12
12	3	-6.65	44.2	16	7.15	51.12
13	6	-3.65	13.3	3	-5.85	34.2
14	3	-6.65	44.2	19	10.15	103.02
15	9	- .65	.422	6	-2.85	8.12
16	9	- .65	.422	3	-5.85	34.2
17	6	-3.65	13.3	9	.15	.0225
18	13	3.35	11.22	6	-2.85	8.12
19	0	-9.65	93.12	13	4.15	17.2
20	19	9.35	87.4	6	- 2.85	8.12
			862.29			416.39

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{SS_1^2 + SS_2^2}{N_1 + N_2 - 2}\right)\left(\frac{1}{N_1} + \frac{1}{N_2}\right)}}$$

$$\frac{9.65 - 8.85}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{862.29 + 416.39}{38}\right)\left(\frac{1}{20} + \frac{1}{20}\right)}} = \frac{.8}{\sqrt{(33.6)(.1)}} =$$

$$\frac{.8}{\sqrt{3.36}} = \frac{.8}{1.83} = .437$$

$t = .437$, $df = 38$, $p = .05$, table value = 2.027

t Test for Posttest

	Experimental $\overline{X}_1 = 93.4$			Control $X_2 = 42.7$		
	X_1	X_1	X_1^2	X_2	X_2	X_2^2
1	97	3.6	12.96	47	4.3	18.49
2	94	.6	.36	44	1.3	1.69
3	100	6.6	43.56	41	-1.7	2.89
4	100	6.6	43.56	38	-4.7	22.09
5	81	-12.4	153.76	47	4.3	18.49
6	88	-5.4	29.16	44	1.3	1.69
7	97	3.6	12.96	47	4.3	18.49
8	88	-5.4	29.16	47	4.3	18.49
9	97	3.6	12.96	56	13.3	176.89
10	100	6.6	43.56	53	10.3	106.09
11	94	.6	.36	38	-4.7	22.09
12	97	3.6	12.96	38	-4.7	22.09
13	94	.6	.36	47	4.3	18.49
14	91	-2.4	5.76	47	4.3	18.49
15	97	3.6	12.96	34	-8.7	75.69
16	97	3.6	12.96	34	-8.7	75.69
17	84	-9.4	88.36	34	-8.7	75.69
18	84	-9.4	88.36	50	7.3	53.29
19	88	-5.4	29.16	34	-8.7	75.69
20	100	6.6	43.56	34	-8.7	75.69
			676.8			898.2

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{SS_1^2 + SS_2^2}{N_1 + N_2 - 2}\right)\left(\frac{1}{N_1} + \frac{1}{N_2}\right)}}$$

$$\frac{93.4 - 42.7}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{676.8 + 898.2}{38}\right)\left(.05 + .05\right)}} = \sqrt{\frac{50.7}{\left(\frac{1575}{38}\right)(.1)}}$$

$$= \sqrt{\frac{50.7}{(41.44)(.1)}} = \sqrt{\frac{50.7}{4.144}} = \frac{50.7}{2.03}$$

$$= 24.97$$

$t = 24.97$, $df = 38$, $p = .05$, table value = 2.027

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33141

Remember (it may not be so long ago) when you were a teenager reading one of your first novels. Perhaps it was a "Hardy Boys" or "Nancy Drew" that taught words so well by context, but every now and then, there was a word you didn't know, hadn't heard of, and surely were not going to stop reading to look up its definition.

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